

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 OSLO 3110

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PINT NO

SUBJ: TRENDS IN NORWAY -- SECOND QUARTER, 1974

REF: OSLO 1324

BEGIN SUMMARY. NORWAY'S MINORITY LABOR GOVERNMENT SURVIVED THE SPRING SESSION OF THE PARLIAMENT WITH NO SERIOUS THREATS TO ITS EXISTENCE. YET THE FORTUNES OF THE ONCE-POWERFUL LABOR PARTY ITSELF CONTINUED TO DECLINE, AND LESS THAN ONE-THIRD OF THE ELECTORATE WAS BEHIND IT WHEN THE MONTHLY PUBLIC OPINION POLL WAS PUBLISHED IN MAY. MOUNTING INTRA-PARTY CRITICISM PROMPTED PRIME MINISTER TRYGVE BRATTELI TO ANNOUNCE IN JUNE THAT HE WILL STEP DOWN NEXT SPRING AS CHAIRMAN OF THE PARTY, AFTER A DECADE IN THAT POSITION. THERE WAS HEAVY SPECULATION WHETHER AND WHEN HE MIGHT ALSO STEP DOWN AS PRIME MINISTER, AND WHO WOULD SUCCEED HIM, SINCE THAT DECISION COULD WELL DETERMINE WHETHER THE LABOR PARTY TURNS FURTHER LEFT OR MODERATES ITS PROGRAM IN AN EFFORT

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TO REGAIN ITS LOST POPULARITY. DURING THE PAST QUARTER,

PUBLIC ATTENTION WAS DEVOTED PRIMARILY TO DOMESTIC RATHER THAN FOREIGN ISSUES--INFLATION, TAXES, WAGES AND OIL--AND THE LAST GALLUP POLL SHOWED 55 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION FAVORING THE NON-SOCIALIST PARTIES. EMD SUMMARY.

1. FOREIGN AFFAIRS DID NOT LOOM VERY LARGE IN NORWAY IN THE SPRING OF 1974. THERE WAS WIDESPREAD INTEREST IN THE INITIAL POST-COUP EVENTS IN PORTUGAL, WHICH RELIEVED PRESURES ON THE GOVERNMENT TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT AFRICAN COLONIES. THERE WAS GOVERNMENTAL AND EDITORIAL RELIEF OVER THE MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT AND ADMIRATION FOR SECRETARY KISSINGER'S SKILL AND PERSISTENCE IN BRINGING IT ABOUT. AND AT THE END OF THE QUARTER THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE SATISFACTION AT THE COMPLETION OF THE ATLANTIC DECLARATION UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH SEEMED TO ASSURE THE CONTINUED VITALITY OF AND US INTEREST IN THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE--WHICH REMAINS THE BASIC UNDERPINNING OF NORWEGIAN FOREIGN POLICY--AND THE CONTINUING RELEVANCE OF NATO BOTH TO NORWEGIAN SECURITY AND TO DETENTE.

2. BY AND LARGE, HOWEVER, THESE EXTERNAL EVENTS WERE OVERSHADOWED IN THE NORWEGIAN POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS BY ISSUES CLOSER TO HOME--INFLATION, WAGE NEGOTIATIONS, FARM SUBSIDIES AND FOOD PRICES, AND ADOPTION OF LONG-RANGE POLICIES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF OFFSHORE OIL AND GAS. THESE AND RELATED DOMESTIC ISSUES PROVIDED THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE CONTINUING EFFORT TO SORT OUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE BASICALLY UNSTABLE GOVERNMENTAL AND PARLIAMENTARY SITUATION PRODUCED BY THE 1973 ELECTIONS.

3. THE ALMOST TRADITIONAL SPRING GOVERNMENTAL "CRISIS"--THIS YEAR OVER THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSAL OF COMPULSORY ARBITRATION IN ITS NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE FARMERS ON PRICES, SUBSIDIES, AND INCOME--WAS RESOLVED WHEN THE CONSERVATIVES SUPPORTED THE GOVERNMENT. BRATTELI ALSO DECIDED NOT TO MAKE THE ISSUE ONE OF CONFIDENCE. ON THE NON-SOCIALIST HALF OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM, NONE OF THE SIX PARTIES IS INTERESTED IN BRINGING DOWN THE GOVERNMENT; SO LONG AS THEY REMAIN A MINORITY OF ONE IN THE STORTING WITH 77 SEATS, THEY HAVE NO CHANCE OF ESTABLISHING A GOVERNMENT WHICH WILL LAST. WITH THE NON-SOCIALISTS SHOWING THE GREATEST SUPPORT (55) PERCENT) CONFIDENTIAL

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IN RECENT YEARS, THEY ARE BEGINNING TO TALK OPTIMISTICALLY OF COMING TO POWER AFTER THE NEXT ELECTIONS IN 1977. THEY SEEMED NO CLOSER, HOWEVER, TO PATCHING UP THEIR DIFFERENCES AND ACTING AS A COHESIVE OPPOSITION AT MID-SUMMER THAN IN THE SPRING OF 1971, WHEN THE THEN FOUR-PARTY COALITION GOVERNMENT CAME APART BECAUSE OF DIFFERENCES OVER COMMON MARKET MEMBERSHIP. PLEASED BY THE NEWLY-ELECTED CHAIRMAN OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY FOR A MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE ON HOW TO ASSURE A NON-SOCIALIST MAJORITY

IN 1977 WERE LARGELY IGNORED, AS BOTH THE CHRISTIAN PEOPLE'S PARTY AND THE CENTER PARTY SHOWED CONTINUING FASCINATION WITH THE IDEA OF A COOPERATIVE ARRANGEMENT WITH THE LABOR PARTY.

4. ON THE SOCIALIST HALF OF THE SPECTRUM, THE PARTIES COMPRISING THE FAR-LEFT SOCIALIST ELECTORAL LEAGUE (SV). FAR FROM GOING THEIR SEPARATE WAYS (AS MANY HAD HOPED AND SOME PREDICTED AFTER THE 1973 ELECTIONS), TOOK ADDITIONAL STEPS TOWARD UNITY THIS SPRING BY AGREEING TO MERGE INTO A UNITED PARTY A YEAR FROM NOW. SV LEADERS EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT THE REMAINING IDEOLOGICAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL OBSTACLES TO SUCH A MERGER CAN BE OVERCOME. AT THE SAME TIME, SOME OF THE SV LEADERSHIP PROFESSED TO BELIEVE IN THE POSSIBILITY OF CLOSER COOPERATION WITH THE LABOR PARTY AND AN EVENTUAL REUNIFICATION OF THE ENTIRE LABOR MOVEMENT--BY IMPLICATION, ON SV'S TERMS.

5. LABOR FOR ITS PART IS SHOWING SOME AWARENESS OF THE NEED FOR REEXAMINING ITS HISTORICAL REFUSAL TO ENTER INTO COALITIONS, WITH PRIME MINISTER AND PARTY CHAIRMAN TRYGVE BRATTELI IN PARTICULAR HAVING HINTED ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS THAT LABOR'S INSISTENCE ON GOING IT ALONE MAY BE OUTMODED. WITH A CHANGE IN PARTY LEADERSHIP NOW IN STORE, HOWEVER, THERE IS UNLIKELY TO BE ANY SERIOUS DISCUSSION OF SUCH A MOMENTOUS POLICY CHANGE BEFORE NEXT YEAR'S PARTY CONGRESS AT THE EARLIEST.

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6. IT IS NO DOUBT TRUE THAT REASONS OF AGE AND HEALTH HAD A MAJOR BEARING ON BRATTELI'S DECISION TO RESIGN NEXT SPRING AS PARTY CHAIRMAN, AFTER A DECADE IN THAT POSITION. IT MAY ALSO BE TRUE, AS HE STATED, THAT HE HAD NEVER INTENDED TO RETAIN THE PARTY LEADERSHIP BEYOND 1975. NONETHELESS, HIS DECISION TO ANNOUNCE HIS INTENTION IN EARLY JUNE, NEARLY A YEAR BEFORE THE LIKELY DATE OF THE CONGRESS WHICH WILL ELECT HIS SUCCESSOR, WAS DOUBTLESS MOTIVATED MORE BY THE PARTY'S HEALTH THAN BY HIS OWN.

7. IRONICALLY, BRATTELI HAD MANEUVERED RATHER SKILLFULLY AS PRIME MINISTER IN AVOIDING ANY SERIOUS THREAT TO HIS MINORITY GOVERNMENT; AS HE HAD PREDICTED, HE DREW SUPPORT FROM BOTH LEFT AND RIGHT IN THE STORTING, ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS, TO IMPLEMENT A RESPECTABLE AMOUNT OF LABOR-SPONSORED LEGISLATION. DEBATE HAS BEEN POSTPONED UNTIL THE FALL SESSION ON TWO OF THE MORE CONTENTIOUS PROPOSALS IN THE LABOR PROGRAM--A LIBERALIZED ABORTION LAW AND "DEMOCRATIZATION" OF COMMERCIAL BANKS.

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8. SURVIVAL AS A GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER, WAS NOT ENOUGH TO PLEASE LABOR'S RANK-AND-FILE SUPPORTERS, AND THERE WERE SIGNS OF GROWING DISCONTENT WITH THE PARTY. BY MAY, THE MONTHLY GALLUP POLLS SHOWED POPULAR SUPPORT FOR THE LABOR PARTY AT A RECORD LOW OF 32.7 PERCENT. AS A CONSEQUENCE, BOTH IN CLOSED PARTY MEETINGS AND EVEN IN SOME SEGMENTS OF THE LABOR PRESS THE QUESTION OF WHO WOULD BE THE NEXT PARTY CHAIRMAN--TRADITIONALLY A TABOO SUBJECT--WAS BEING DISCUSSED, AND THE MESSAGE TO BRATTELI WAS CLEAR. HIS ANNOUNCEMENT ON JUNE 7 MAY HELP TO REVERSE LABOR'S RECENT POPULARITY DECLINE (THE POLL PUBLISHED ON JUNE 10, REFLECTING OPINIONS SAMPLED BEFORE THE BRATTELI ANNOUNCEMENT, DID IN FACT SHOW A SLIGHT UPSWING, TO 33.0 PERCENT). IN ADDITION, THE BRATTELI GOVERNMENT HAS JUST ANNOUNCED THE ONE MEASURE MORE LIKELY THAN ANY OTHER TO ARREST THE LOSS OF POPULAR SUPPORT. SOMETIMES ACCUSED OF BEING AN OUTMODED IDEOLOGIST, FINANCE MINISTER PER KLEPPE HAS RECENTLY SHOWN SIGNS OF AWARENESS THAT THE AVERAGE LABOR VOTER HIMSELF NOW SUFFERS FROM FORMERLY POPULAR SOAK-THE-RICH TAXATION MEASURES AND IS CRYING FOR TAX RELIEF. KLEPPE ANNOUNCED ON JUNE 17, AFTER A JOINT MEETING OF LEADERS OF THE LABOR PARTY, THE TRADE UNION FEDERATION, AND THE TRADE UNIONS, THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL PROPOSE "SIGNIFICANT REDUCTIONS" IN DIRECT TAXES NEXT FALL. SUBSEQUENT STATEMENTS SUGGEST THAT HE HAS NO CLEAR IDEA AS YET ON HOW TO COVER THE REDUCED TAX REVENUES.

9 VICE CHAIRMAN REIUL STEEN IS EXPECTED TO TAKE OVER AS LABOR PARTY CHAIRMAN, EVEN BY THE MANY WHO OPPOSE HIM. THOSE WHO WOULD BE CONCERNED TO SEE STEEN USE HIS POSITION AS A STEPPING STONE TO THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP ARE NOW SUGGESTING THAT BRATTELI WILL, OR SHOULD, ALSO STEP DOWN AS PRIME MINISTER NEXT YEAR IN FAVOR OF LABOR PARLIAMENTARY LEADER ODVAR NORDLI. AT THIS MOMENT WHEN THE LABOR PARTY IS IN SEARCH OF A POLICY TO REGAIN ITS LOST POPULARITY, THE SUCCESSION QUESTION TAKES ON HEAVY IDEOLOGICAL COLORING, WITH SOME HOPING STEEN WILL SEEK SUPPORT ON THE LEFT AND OTHERS HOPING NORDLI OR EDUCATION MINISTER BJARTMAR GJERDE WILL PRESERVE A MORE CENTRIST, MODERATE PROGRAM. WHAT IS CERTAIN IS THAT BRATTELI--DESPITE SOME COMPROMISES WITH THE SV--HAS BEEN UNWILLING OR UNABLE TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THE DILEMMA POSED BY SIMULTANEOUS DEFECTIONS FROM BOTH THE LEFT WING AND THE RIGHT WING OF THE PARTY. IT IS OBVIOUSLY DIFFICULT TO SAY WHAT CHANGES
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A NEW PARTY CHAIRMAN AND PRIME MINISTER WOULD MAKE IN THE ACTUAL POLICIES OF THE LABOR PARTY, BUT ONE MAY SUSPECT THAT NONE OF THE LEADING CANDIDATES TO SUCCEED BRATTELI WOULD BE LIKELY TO BRING ABOUT PRECIPITATE CHANGES IN FOREIGN POLICY. THE COMPOSITION OF THE DEFENSE COMMISSION AS FINALLY ANNOUNCED AT THE END OF MAY ALSO SEEMS CALCULATED TO ASSURE THAT ITS COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW WILL NOT RESULT IN ANY FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES IN NORWAY'S DEFENSE STRUCTURE.
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